



Sermon by Pr. Troy Pflibsen, Director for Evangelical Mission

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Acts 16:6-15

Paul's Vision of the Man From Macedonia

⁶Paul and his companions traveled all through the area of Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit had kept them from preaching the word in Asia Minor. ⁷They came to the border of Mysia. From there they tried to enter Bithynia. But the Spirit of Jesus would not let them. ⁸So they passed by Mysia. Then they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia standing and begging him. "Come over to Macedonia!" the man said. "Help us!" ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia. We decided that God had called us to preach the good news there.

Lydia Becomes a Believer in Philippi

¹¹At Troas we got into a boat. We sailed straight for Samothrace. The next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹²From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony. It is an important city in that part of Macedonia. We stayed there several days.

¹³On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate. We walked down to the river. There we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered together. ¹⁴One of the women listening was from the city of Thyatira. Her name was Lydia, and her business was selling purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to accept Paul's message. ¹⁵She and her family were baptized. Then she invited us to her home. "Do you consider me a believer in the Lord?" she asked. "If you do, come and stay at my house." She succeeded in getting us to go home with her.

A big controversy in the earliest church.

The fight was whether the faith was for the Jews only or does it extend to include all people?

The context for this was that most of the first converts were Jews.

The disciples were Jews.

Jesus spent most of his time with the Jews.

And yet, and here was the rub, Jesus himself was not exclusive to the Jews.

His mandate was to reach out to all.

Matthew 28 states this clearly, as do many other passages of scripture, “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”

So, when Jesus was no longer physically present, what happened? The early leaders did what is our human tendency. They spent their time with those they were the most comfortable with, the Jews.

This was not God’s intent.

It took a while, and with some really hard pushing by the Holy Spirit, the early Christians did start to include non-Jews.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch is one such story

Peter, his visions, and Cornelius

Some of Paul’s work.

And there was a council meeting of the early leaders who made a formal decision to reach out to all.

All of this is the backdrop for the story of Lydia.

Lydia was a worshipper of God. This is biblical code language that means that she was a non-Jew and yet followed the Jewish religion and practices.

And I state the obvious, she was a woman.

As a woman she was little better than property in the ancient world.

And yet here is Paul, and this is key, having clearly been led by the Spirit, ministering to this non-Jewish woman.

His was an intentional ministry to someone who was an outsider.

So, what are the parallels in our own contexts?

Who are our outsiders?

All of us believe that our congregations are welcoming. We are there because we have felt welcomed.

We also feel that we are personally welcoming.

We work hard to invite and engage with people so they feel included.

But our efforts are not perfect.

Even Peter relapsed and Paul had to call him out as recorded in Galatians 2.

So, where are the points, the places, the people who we struggle with the most to welcome?

Who are our Lydias? Who are the non-Jewish women in our mix?

I can't answer these questions for you.

The responses are different with each community, person and situation.

Today's story reflects the early church's struggle with whom they were going to reach out to.

- Jews
- Non-Jews
- Women
- Insiders
- Outsiders

We still struggle with this.

Who are our Lydias and how do we reach out to them?

Amen.